

January 16, 2014

HUFF
POST RELIGION

Candace Conti Awarded \$28M In Jehovah's Witness Sex Abuse Case

06/16/12 06:33 PM ET **AP**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- A Northern California jury has awarded \$28 million in damages to a woman who said the Jehovah's Witnesses allowed an adult member of a Fremont church to molest her when she was a child in the mid-1990s.

Alameda County jurors awarded \$7 million in compensatory damages on Wednesday and another \$21 million in punitive damages on Thursday to Candace Conti, her attorney, Rick Simons said.

"This is the largest jury verdict for a single victim in a religious child abuse case in the country," Simons told The Associated Press.

In her lawsuit, Conti, now 26, said from 1995-1996, when she was 9 and 10 years old and a member of the North Fremont Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, she was repeatedly molested by a fellow congregant, Jonathan Kendrick.

The Associated Press does not normally name victims of child sexual abuse but Conti has identified herself publicly to encourage other victims of sexual abuse to come forward, Simons said.

"Nothing can bring back my childhood," Conti told the Oakland Tribune. "But through this (verdict) and through, hopefully, a change in their policy, we can make something good come out of it."

Conti also claimed in her suit that the religion's national leaders formed a policy in 1989 that instructed the religion's elders to keep child sex abuse accusations secret. Congregation elders followed that policy when Kendrick was convicted in 1994 of misdemeanor child molestation in Alameda County, according to Simons.

Kendrick was never criminally charged in the case involving Conti, but besides the 1994 conviction, he was later convicted in 2004 of lewd or lascivious acts with a child, records show.

Kendrick, 58, now lives in Oakley, Calif., according to California's sex offender registry. A message left with a person answering the phone at his home was not immediately returned.

Kendrick was ordered to pay 60 percent of the judgment, but Simons said there would be no attempt to collect any money from Kendrick, in part, because he would not be able to pay the judgment. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York -- the organization overseeing the Jehovah's Witnesses -- would be responsible for 40 percent, Simons said.

Jim McCabe, an attorney for the congregation, said he planned to appeal the jury's decision.

"The Jehovah's Witnesses hate child abuse and believe it's a plague on humanity," McCabe told the Tribune. "Jonathan Kendrick was not a leader or a pastor, he was just a rank-and-file member. This is a tragic case where a member of a religious group has brought liability on the group for actions he alone may have taken."

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Filed by Paul Brandeis Raushenbush |

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[Redacted text]

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sputinc7
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this man was clearly just a member of the congregation, not a leader, elder, or ministerial servant. considering he was never even convicted of the supposed crime, I don't see how she could have won unless those on the jury were biased against this religious group. I can assure you these people have no rule of any kind that says to keep accusations secret, unless they are without proper merit. The Bible says there needs to be at least 2 witnesses of a crime to be judged, and if that was not the case, for the possibility of innocence on the man's part here, they would not make it public knowledge, otherwise HE could sue them for defamation of character. this jury was biased, and this will be overturned on appeal. It's DEFINITELY not the church's fault what a member does wrong, especially if he doesn't serve in any responsible position, which is the case here.

16 JUN 2012 9:56 PM

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Julie B. (Jewel5)

SUPER USER · 808 Fans · The facts have a liberal bias

★ 17

He was allowed to take children out in "the Kingdom Ministry". He had been convicted of child abuse in 1994. The responsibility of the elders was to notify proper authorities, not to try to determine innocence or guilt themselves.

16 JUN 2012 10:00 PM

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Dan Crabtree (Dan_Crabtree)

SUPER USER · 774 Fans

★ 2

Money soothes all aches and horrible memories instantly...And the best place to find it is in liberal state and a liberal court...as this is where you bring that law-suit...almost guaranteed a win of huge proportions..

16 JUN 2012 11:09 PM

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Ian C. (isc121)

SUPER USER · 164 Fans

★ 5

So what should she have done? Said, "Oh well what is done is done. No need to bring it up at all"?

16 JUN 2012 11:13 PM

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**cyanmanta**

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Thinking outside the box is for smart people...

★ 25

Americans are so unbelievably blind when it comes to organized religion. They just don't seem to notice that churches are just tax-free businesses and political lobbying arms that refuse to be questioned or challenged in any way, no matter what horrible things they do. In America, the church can do no wrong and the nonbeliever can do no right, even when the nonbelievers are fighting hard for the rights of strangers while the faithful are sheltering crooks and predators from justice. There is no doubt in my mind which side are the true keepers of morality and ethics in the world today...

16 JUN 2012 7:40 PM

REPLY FAVE MORE

**Sjoerd W.** (Sjoerd_W)

SUPER USER · 511 Fans

Always look for common ground.

★ 2

Excellent post! F&F.

I long for the day the Pope and his minions are wanted criminals, organised religion is taxed and sued to financial death, atheists rise far above rapists in the trust-polls and any religious leader that is proven to had a hand in ruining a life kicked out of society.

16 JUN 2012 8:37 PM

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**squatmunkie**

SUPER USER · 189 Fans

★ 1

For \$28 million dollars you can molest me all you want.

16 JUN 2012 10:03 PM

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**lillyroses4o**

204 Fans

I waited patiently for the Lord....40

★ 7

Be careful what you ask for....

16 JUN 2012 10:07 PM

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**Cass_Cohen**

18 Fans

★ 2

Ms. Conti tried for two years (beginning in 2009 to get JW to change the policy and make a public announcement regarding a criminal background (she knew they would continue to refuse). It is in the court records, look it up. When they refused, and

instead went with bible scripture and the law (and she knew they would) then she sued.

Ms. Conti claims to have been abused during the mid 1990s. Mr. Kendrick was only found guilty of a felony crime requiring him to register as a sex offender in 2004. Making a public announcement would have been defamation of character at worst, and false light at best. Before anyone jumps all over me, the incident with Kendrick's step daughter was deemed a misdemeanor (blame the law) and not one that is required to be disclosed publicly, further to do so could be seen in a court of law as a legal invasion of privacy. Of course this is an emotionally charged issue, but our world is organized, and not ruled by emotion. If you do not like the laws, work to have them changed rather than looking for a scapegoat which JW have most certainly been made in this case.

18 JUN 2012 3:40 PM

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Cass_Cohen

18 Fans

★ 2

My point, it was not within the legal rights of the JW congregation to do what Ms Conti requested.

18 JUN 2012 3:45 PM

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bermudababy

81 Fans

Left lane for passing only!!

★ 2

A truly uncomfortable story for me as a Witness of Jehovah. While I can only go on the information provided in this story, I must say that I am suprized by the uneducated comments I've read.

I realize that It casts a dark shadow over the Organization as a whole but it shouldn't. The Friends who share my Faith in Jehovah are truly saddened by these accounts. I feel sorry for this young woman and the horror she endured. No one should be abused. Much less from a member of their Faith.

To judge a whole group on the actions of a very sick individual is wrong. Too many posts on this thread are 'jump on the band wagon' posts. Mostly unoriginal and mean spirited it tone.

No one knows all of the pieces to this story. I know for myself I never comment on other stories when it comes to sensitive subject matter such as this. I know I don't have the whole story so I'd be a hypocrit to weigh in with only half the story to go on. I do know there are much more stringent safeguards in place to do as much as possible to protect potential victims. Just as with any organized Faith as of late more and more of these instances are surfacing. I ask all to dig deep into your particular group, faith based or not, and I say you'll find some skelotens too. Sad indeed, all around.

21 JUN 2012 9:47 AM

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samlee

51 Fans

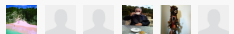
★ 3

Being VERY familiar with JW's, I am not being mean spirited, but I fully recognize that what people see as a benign presence in their community, is not really so. Stories and attempts by other victims within the organization to bring these matters to court in the hopes that the rules will change so there are not other victims, have been pretty well kept quiet. This is the first major public victory and it must be applauded for exposing some of the power and direction that the Society has taken to this point.

I am against the two witness rule and shunning (and others) both of which are abusive and dangerous to members of the organization. JW's are NOT like other religions. They are an extreme fundamentalist religion who ensures a base through fear. Fear of dying at Armageddon. Fear of losing one's friends and family. Fear. JW's are taught to love their Brothers and Sisters because they are servants of Jehovah and He comes first, but by doing so, we replace the true love that should be held sacrosanct within the family itself. That is why it is so easy for a person to shun another, why they can shun their children or parents - because they are conditioned to believe that they must honor and remain loyal to the congregation first and everyone else second. Not all JW's are bad people by any means, but we should not accept that they are just like any other religion.

21 JUN 2012 10:08 AM

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MrWorldly

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★ 14

Although Jonathon Kendrick wasn't an elder in the congregation, he was an ordained minister who was expected by the congregation to engage in the public, door to door ministry accompanied by other members of the congregation, including minors. The religion was aware of the danger and did nothing to protect the public and the children in their congregation.

If I place a fox in someone's chicken coup, it's silly to blame the fox for the dead chickens. I should have to pay for the predictable consequences of my actions.

Jehovah's Witnesses continue to send known sexual predators to people's doors. They must stop this or face the possibility of being sued into bankruptcy. If anything, this judgement is too small.

16 JUN 2012 7:16 PM

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thruth

7 Fans ♥

★ 2

I would like to see the proof that Jehovah's Witnesses allowed this to happen. I would like to see where they passed something saying to keep sex abuse quiet. How would they have known unless this guy told them in confidence. Then the witnesses could be sued for making it public. the article did not say whether other people in the congregation had reported abuse by this guy. if no one else came forward and the girl didn't report it then how could the Society know about this guy?

16 JUN 2012 8:05 PM

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Arnos Cruises-Arno (massagebearnj)

SUPER USER · 393 Fans ♥

28 Million Dollars, WOW. Yeah that sure makes her happy now.

17 JUN 2012 9:45 AM

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Chris V. (DarkSyn)
884 Fans

★ 3

You think that erases the year of child molestation she went through at the hands of people she should have been able to trust?

17 JUN 2012 9:49 AM

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FlamingLibrul
6,108 Fans · 100% Snark, Guaranteed!

★ 8

Kendrick was convicted in 1994 of misdemeanor child molestation in Alameda County...

How is it even possible that any level or form of child molestation could be considered a misdemeanor?! That is just insane.

17 JUN 2012 10:59 AM

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GTFOOH
484 Fans · Truth fears no questions

★ 1

If he had touched crack cocaine instead of a kid, he would be in jail by now.

17 JUN 2012 11:04 AM

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Joseph Miceli (joe1964)
SUPER USER · 2,153 Fans · Celebrate France, 1789 at Goldman Sachs

★ 15

"This is a tragic case where a member of a religious group has brought liability on the group for actions he alone may have taken."

I would agree with that, except for...

" the religion's national leaders formed a policy in 1989 that instructed the religion's elders to keep child sex abuse accusations secret. Congregation elders followed that policy when Kendrick was convicted in 1994 of misdemeanor child molestation in Alameda County."

Sue them till they are as poor as Christ demanded them to be in the first place.
Hypocrites.

17 JUN 2012 11:34 AM

REPLY FAVE MORE



Gregory B. (salamanca1)
SUPER USER · 1,228 Fans · We'll never run out of stupidity

★ 5

Yeah, the hypocrisy is strong with this church. Faved.

17 JUN 2012 11:39 AM

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